1: Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
SR8 Bush Negroes SR8
Saramacca

"OBIA COMES!"

"Do not take too much rum," he said. "When there is much to drink, obia does not come." 76A 796

The bottle ready, we waited. Eight, half-past, nine o'clock. When we had decided they were not coming for us, the sharp bark of Tross signaled the approach of a man up the path from the river bank. As he came into the circle of light, we recognized Apanto.

"Everything is ready, Bak'a," he said. "Come."

It was not an important village, this one across the river from our camp. It was smaller and had much less power than Gankwe, the seat of a clan head. But enough men had assembled for the ceremonies to make a dance, and the women were standing about waiting as we came from the river through the palm-frond guard. The moon was again up, but moving clouds hid it from view or covered it with a haze which dimmed its brilliance. A few houses fronted on the little clearing where the dance was to be held, and here and there some oil lanterns had been placed.

Not everything, we soon learned, was ready, for drums were lacking. They had an agida, but the two others which were needed were not there. Poor villages very often had to borrow their drums from other settlements. The dancers stood about waiting. [92L]

We offered the tumao we had acquired, and Bayo returned to our camp for it. A large tin basin, turned upside down, gave the same metallic tenor voice as the apinti, and so with the makeshift orchestra the dancing began, two younger boys playing the kwakwa. 76A 53A

For a time it seemed as though we were only to see seketi. The children had had no opportunity at all to perform, and they stood about watching, while their elders danced the social dance we had seen so often. There was a tall man from a friendly village farther down the river whose dancing that night stood out. The careful awkwardness of his legs as he danced facing us, the carefully timed movements of arms and body showed us that in seketi, too, as the proverb ran, there were truly men on the lower river, as there were on the upper. 76A 796

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157 241 31 in a sector recognized to be undamaged. But objections immediately come to their minds: one would not feel at home, people would be jealous of one another; above all, the children would go pilfering fruit and vegetables in the clearings of other families. The Refugee Blacks are unanimous in thinking that the children of one village put together in a single place would constitute a scourge much worse than the manioc-ant, and that dispersion is the wisest solution for maintaining the peace of families.

562 241 One observes likewise that the total freedom of woman, and the custom which leaves to her /290/ the free disposal of the products of the clearing, contribute toward preventing the development of agriculture with an eye to selling. In order [592] to undertake large clearings farmed jointly by one household, it would be necessary to have very unified and stable households, which is rare.

157 476 Difficulty of grouping for common advantage. The Refugee Blacks are incapable of forming groups voluntarily to undertake the execution of a job with an eye to common advantage. The small groups which get together for fishing, working gold, etc. are formed of intimate friends or near relatives and are hardly larger than four or five persons.

157 454 The Refugee Blacks are still less capable of grouping themselves into societies looking toward future benefits. Putting a part of their resources into a common pot with that of another seems to them not only illusory but immoral. Because of this fact there exists among them no way to group financial assets, sometimes good-sized.

• 426 Lending without interest is practiced rather commonly, having to do with small sums between near relatives or intimate friends. If a man feels capable of earning his living by buying a motor, he will succeed rather easily in finding the necessary money by borrowing from his brothers or friends. 10,000 francs

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426 here, 5,000 there. But these loans are never large and do not constitute an effective process for grouping financial assets.

150 525 The so-called subscription societies so common in Black Africa are totally contrary to the thinking of the Refugee Blacks, in the same way as games of chance. In 1958 the Maripasoula post, on the occasion of a festival, had organized a tombola. When the principle of it was explained to the Boni, they were unanimous in thinking that the Europeans had odd amusements. Few of them agreed to buy tickets, and the ones who had not won anything left embittered, with the feeling of having been involved in an immoral operation.

157 571 High esteem attached to contracts. This inaptitude for forming groups and combining assets contributes very much toward crystallizing the society of the Refugee Blacks in its present form by opposing all large-scale initiative. On the other hand, 157 577 426 it develops the sense of personal responsibility. The Refugee Blacks are especially strict with respect to money (1).

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1. This with regard to their mutual relations; as for debts to Europeans, they are not prompt in paying them back; but marked deception, borrowing done for the purpose of swindling, are very rare with the Refugee Blacks.

[829] Custom lays down as a strict principle that everything must be paid for. No one may live at the expense of someone [613] else, no one may borrow without paying back. If a man died before repaying a debt, the members of his lineage would club together to pay it off.